



**United States Department of State**

*Assistant Secretary*

*Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration*

*Washington, D.C. 20520*

October 21, 2005

Dear Mr. Cromartie:

Thank you for your letter regarding the protection of returning Christians to Northern Iraq. I share your concern regarding this potentially vulnerable group.

As you noted in your letter, the 2005 UNHCR Return Advisory indicates that, regarding returns to the three northern Governorates, "no persons should be returned forcibly unless it has been ascertained that they have family and community links that can enable access to protection, housing, employment, and basic services." The advisory does not provide further information on what constitutes sufficient family and community ties to provide necessary protection. However, UNHCR recently issued its "Guidelines Relating to the Eligibility of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers," which identifies a number of vulnerable populations, including Christians. We will continue to work closely with UNHCR to ensure that vulnerable Iraqis receive appropriate protection and assistance until durable solutions can be found.

Vulnerable individuals, including members of minority religious and ethnic groups, may require specific consideration when determining what constitutes sufficient protection in the northern Governorates or other regions of Iraq.

We agree with UNHCR, however, that voluntary returns to the three northern Governorates are feasible. Successful returns to that area have been taking place for some time, taking into account security concerns and in conjunction with protection and assistance packages.

I hope this answers your question.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Greene, Acting